

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT - OTHER ISSUES

Issue Goals and Strategies

Reservoir Operations

Goals

Work cooperatively with Department of Natural Resource and Conservation (DNRC), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and NorthWestern Energy to incorporate fisheries management and angler access concerns into reservoir operation management throughout the plan area.

Waterbody Strategies

All Reservoirs:

- Continue participation with the reservoir operations steering committee to focus efforts on optimizing reservoir operations for the fisheries resources. The reservoir operations steering committee, comprised of FWP, NorthWestern Energy, BOR, irrigators, marina operators, guides and outfitters, and sportsmen, meets annually to review water supply forecasts, proposed dam operations and operational guidelines in an effort to minimize impacts of dam operations on fish, wildlife and recreational resources.
- Work with reservoir steering committee to manage reservoir operations to promote better fish habitat and promote shoreline vegetation development.

Fishing Contests

Goals:

Any regional, district-wide or statewide policies, restrictions or regulations governing contests which may be developed during the plan period and which geographically include Canyon Ferry, Hauser or Holter Reservoirs will supersede restrictions listed here unless less restrictive.

- Fishing contests can impact fish populations and conflict with non-contest angling and recreational opportunity. All proposed contests will be evaluated based upon biological impacts, consistency with fishery management goals, potential conflict with other recreational users, and public safety.
- Contests for young anglers should avoid competitive events by structuring the derbies to reward participation rather than for catching the largest or most fish.

Waterbody Strategies

Canyon Ferry Reservoir:

Regulation of fishing contests on Canyon Ferry Reservoir will be based on management strategies for individual fish species. Generally, this will require a conservative approach to harvesting native fishes (burbot or ling) and sport fish species (trout and perch) that are subject to predation by walleye. Management strategies direct a liberal approach to harvesting walleye unless monitoring shows a significant decline in walleye. If walleye decline below the goal of 3 per gillnet for 2 to 3 years, tournaments may be restricted or denied to minimize handling mortality. Conversely, if walleye monitoring shows 2 to 3 years exceeding 7 per gillnet, it may be necessary to encourage or require selective harvest of fish taken to support management objectives.

Rainbow Trout

- Harvest from competitive fishing events is not consistent with the management strategy to maintain conservative regulations relating to rainbow trout harvest and support year around angler opportunity
 - Maintain the past and current management strategy of not allowing fishing contests for rainbow trout.

Yellow Perch

- Perch are highly sought after by anglers as a sport fish in both the ice and open water seasons, but also are the primary forage fish for all piscivorous (fish-eating) fish species in the reservoir.
 - Maintain the past and current management strategy of allowing one competitive fishing event during January.
- Based on the conservative perch harvest limits adopted by the FWP Commission, it may be necessary to modify the structure of events to ensure compliance with the current daily harvest limits.

Walleye

- Fishing contests would potentially attract new or additional anglers to the reservoir to assist efforts to promote angler harvest of walleye, which is consistent with strategies to manage walleye numbers.
- Authorize up to three contests in a calendar year but no more than one per month to provide a balance with existing users of the reservoir that are not interested in competitive fishing events and who would be negatively impacted by tournament activities.
 - Does not include winter contests which allow for competitive fishing for largest walleye.

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- Fish mortality for catch and release contests is a concern during the summer months when water temperatures exceed 65 degrees. Logistics for handling and transporting fish will be addressed as necessary to minimize mortality.

Burbot (Ling)

- Burbot population trends are not well understood and additional harvest caused by competitive fishing may cause unforeseen impacts to the fishery. Burbot are a long-lived and slow growing native species.
- Allow up to two contests per year. These events can allow for competitive fishing for large and/or the largest fish and cannot include competitive fishing for the most fish or most total weight of fish.

Carp

- Carp are a non-game fish, that probably contribute very little to the community of native and/or game fish in the reservoir. No biological concerns would be raised by carp contests. There is currently no biological need to restrict the number of carp contests.
- No restriction on number of events other than the total number of events allowed on Canyon Ferry Reservoir, but contests must be compatible with management objectives.
- Adult competitive carp events can and should emphasize biggest fish, most fish and/or most weight. Harvest is recommended but not required.

Hauser Reservoir:

- Do not allow ice fishing contests on Hauser Reservoir for public safety reasons. Ice on Hauser often does not develop to a thickness that would allow for safe ice-fishing.
- No more than three contests will be allowed each year. Contests would be required to coordinate with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and/or FWP for access (where appropriate). FWP will encourage use of private access facilities (where possible) to alleviate crowding problems.
- Monitor harvest associated with angling contests. If harvest of sport fish is deemed excessive and detrimental to the population, angling contests of this nature will be discontinued.

Holter Reservoir:

- Do not allow open water or ice fishing tournaments on Holter Reservoir to minimize conflicts with the general angling public and to address safety issues.

All Reservoirs:

- Harvest-oriented and/or catch and release contest sponsors may be required to accommodate data collection or fish tagging by the department. Important data can be generated from the tagging or sampling of fish caught during contests that would be beneficial to management of the fishery.
- Regulation of contests will account for the need to distribute tournaments evenly throughout the year and provide for angling opportunities on the reservoir free from contests. A maximum of 12 contests per year of any type (open water angling, ice fishing, bowfishing, etc.) will be permitted. More than one contest will not be permitted for the same day and contests will not be approved for consecutive weekends in order to minimize the potential for conflicts. Applications will be considered on a first come basis until all available slots are filled.
- Applications must be received by July 1 for ice derbies and November 1 for open water of the year preceding the proposed tournament. Applications received earlier than May 1 for ice fishing and September 1 for open water will be returned to the applicant for resubmittal.
- All applications for contests, regardless of their harvest or catch and release status, will receive the same consideration. Preference will be given to contests held previously.

Prohibited Use of Live Fish as Bait

Goals:

Prevent introduction of new fish species, invasive species or pathogens into the upper Missouri River Reservoir system from the use of live fish as bait.

Waterbody Strategies

All Reservoirs:

- Continue to prohibit the possession or use of live fish as bait throughout the plan area but continue to explore the subject.
- Initiate education efforts regarding the risks associated with use of live baitfish and the importance of preventing inadvertent introductions of new species.
- Educate anglers regarding effective bait alternatives that are commercially available that pose no threat of inadvertent species introductions.
- Any proposal to implement the use of live bait will require an Environmental Assessment and provide opportunity for public comment. No management action will be taken without thorough research and evaluation of risk of live bait.

Habitat

Goals

Aggressively protect and enhance fish habitat as a management tool; enhance fish spawning opportunities in plan area reservoirs, river and their tributaries.

Waterbody Strategies

Hauser and Holter Reservoirs and Tributaries:

- Develop a list of habitat projects that could be funded by NorthWestern Energy (NWE) through Federal Energy Regulatory Committee relicensing funds. Develop this list in conjunction with sportsmen's groups and local watershed groups. Prioritize projects based on cost-effectiveness and highest benefit.
- Implement enhancement projects that will benefit spawning and recruitment of wild fish in Hauser and Holter Reservoirs and their tributaries.
- Submit Future Fisheries and NWE grant proposals for habitat enhancement projects benefiting Hauser and Holter Reservoir, their tributaries, and fish populations.

All Plan Sections:

- Efforts to expand yellow perch spawning and rearing habitat may enhance habitat diversity for this important game fish and forage species. Implementation will focus on using natural materials, limiting costs, and monitoring effectiveness.
- Enhancement projects for salmonids will focus on providing fishing opportunities and spawning areas in the upper Missouri River reservoir system to enhance trout fishing opportunities in locations where walleye are less abundant.
- Enhancement of tributary habitat and improved water quality will be used to mitigate effects of disease, drought, and other factors on trout populations in the upper Missouri River reservoirs system.
- Other habitat concerns will be addressed by working with BOR on reservoir level issues, DNRC on Toston Dam operation and Broadwater Power Project mitigation, and/or NWE on Hauser and Holter Dam operations. Additional consideration will be made by reviewing 310 and 124 permitting, private pond licensing, and implementation and monitoring of instream flow reservations on the UMRRFMP river sections and associated tributaries.

Disease and Aquatic Invasive Species

Goals

Prevent the introduction and establishment of new aquatic invasive species and pathogens and limit the expansion of current invasive species.

Waterbody Strategies

All Plan Sections:

- Continue fish health and aquatic invasive species certification of State Hatcheries, including egg sources.
- Continue education efforts to reduce spread of pathogens and aquatic invasive species.
- Continue regulating private ponds.
- Continue monitoring of invasive species and pathogens.
- Continue work with Enforcement personnel to ensure compliance with AIS and aquatic transport rules.

Piscivorous Birds

Goals

Explore working with FWP Wildlife Division and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine the impacts of piscivorous birds to plan area fish populations. Consider active bird management strategies if research shows significant impacts to fish populations are identified.

Waterbody Strategies

Canyon Ferry Reservoir:

- Continue to explore monitoring and research to assess seasonal diet and composition for pelicans and cormorants. Assessments directly related to the Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area (CFWMA) requires compliance with the current CFWMA Management Plan (MFWP 1992-B)
- Determine if population control measures could positively influence fish populations.
- Any proposal to implement population management measures will require an Environmental Assessment, permitting from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and opportunity for public comment. No management action will be taken without thorough research and evaluation of bird and fish interactions.

Access

Goals

Identify areas and strategies to improve fishing, boating, camping, and other outdoor recreation opportunities in the plan area. Maintain or improve quality access to plan area reservoirs and rivers which are some of the most heavily fished waterbodies in the state; especially for shore, youth, and disabled anglers.

Waterbody Strategies

Canyon Ferry Reservoir:

- Continue working with BOR about installing an additional boat ramp on the east shore (i.e., Duck Creek, Confederate Bay) to reduce bank erosion due to boats launching from the beach and for public safety during wind and storm events.

Holter Reservoir:

- Work with BLM, NorthWestern Energy, private landowners, and other interests to improve fishing access to Holter, with an emphasis on areas that provide more opportunity for youth and disabled anglers.

All Plan Sections:

- Educate anglers and landowners about what areas are legally accessible by anglers and recreators.
- Maintain existing Fishing Access Site areas, improve where necessary and evaluate opportunities for increasing access.

Flushing Losses

Goal

Monitor annual and seasonal flushing and survival rates of fish from plan area reservoirs.

Waterbody Strategies

All Reservoirs:

- Determine walleye flushing rates from Canyon Ferry Reservoir and evaluate measures to reduce or eliminate walleye flushing from Canyon Ferry Dam into plan sections downstream (e.g., tagging studies, request funding from the Bureau of Reclamation).
- Continue to evaluate entrainment and flushing rates of fish out of plan area dams. Determine timing and magnitude of flushing losses.
- Determine feasibility of reducing fish flushing losses out of plan area dams.
- Evaluate screening devices that would reduce flushing losses.
- Investigate other technologies that may be effectively employed to reduce fish flushing losses and entrainment to downstream waters.

Low Dissolved Oxygen (DO)

Goals

Monitor DO values in Hauser Reservoir to ensure that water released from Canyon Ferry contains at least 5mg/l DO throughout the summer and fall.

Waterbody Strategies

Hauser Reservoir:

- Continue to monitor fish movement in Hauser Reservoir. Work with BOR to revisit use of air compressor units on Canyon Ferry Dam.
- Evaluate the results of the most recent flushing study at Hauser Dam (Spinelli 2014) to determine effects of water quality on fish entrainment at Hauser Dam and determine if low DO increases fish flushing out of Hauser Reservoir.
- Enhance water quality monitoring by collecting DO measurements in the upper reservoir during low DO periods (July-September).

Recreation Management

Goals

Evaluate angler dynamics and maximize safety on the river between Hauser Dam and upper Holter Reservoir.

Waterbody Strategies

Hauser Dam to Holter Reservoir:

- Maintain the no wake zone from Beaver Creek to the base of Hauser Dam.
- Continue enforcement efforts to reduce conflicts between boaters and shore anglers, especially during high use periods.
- Monitor spawning activities and evaluate the effects of motorized boat use and wade fishing on spawning behavior.
- Develop a recreational survey to better evaluate use by boaters, guides, and wade anglers.
- Continue angler creel census to evaluate angling dynamics throughout this section.